

Bodie - General
Mono County
California

HABS No. CAL-1918

HABS

CAL

26. Bodie

1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
1000 Geary Street
San Francisco, California

HABS
CAL
26-Bodie
1-

PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CAL-1918
Page 1

BODIE - GENERAL

Mono County, California

ADDRESS: Bodie, Mono County, California
OWNER: State of California and Various
OCCUPANT: Division of Beaches and Parks
USE: State Park

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Bodie is a Registered National Historic Landmark, and California Historical Landmark #341.

Placer gold was first discovered here in July, 1839 and a quartz vein was discovered in August, 1859; but, though many efforts were made to exploit the area, it was not until 1874 that the great potential wealth of the district became promising. Bodie reached its pinnacle by 1879-80 when the population was estimated at 10 to 12 thousand, and when the production from the mines on Bodie Bluff was at its peak.

During all of the productive years the mines contributed from 95 to 100 million in gold and silver bullion; and "highgrading" was carried on so openly that it was the magnet for the worst of the underworld who made "The Bad Man From Bodie" notorious.

Because of the remoteness and the rapid exodus of the populace when mining became unproductive the town is truly a "Ghost Town", without a single all-year inhabitant and with buildings typical of a hastily built mining camp gradually falling to ruins. Its final demise occurred after the fire of 1946 destroyed the Klipstein-Rosecrans mill which had just been restored to operation in a sporadic effort

CAL-1918
Page 2

to revive gold mining in face of diminishing returns due to price pegging.

Bodie has been acquired (in 1962) by the State of California as a State Park under the jurisdiction of the Division of Beaches and Parks.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

William S. Bodey, in company with three prospector companions - Doyle, Garraty and Black Taylor - arrived in the vicinity in July 1859, and discovered placer in a gulch just northwest of the present town which they named Taylor Gulch. They erected a cabin at a spring, afterwards known as Pearson Springs, the exact location of which is not now known.

The winter of '59 came early and was very severe. Bodey and Taylor were then alone in the Gulch when in November they set out on foot to Monoville to replenish their supplies. On their return trip they were caught in a blizzard and got lost. Bodey's strength gave out and in spite of Taylor's heroic efforts, he perished and only his bones were found the next spring. Taylor buried the remains where he had perished.

Taylor, himself, later met a violent death at the hands of hostile Painto Indians who caught him unaware in his lonely cabin at Benton and decapitated him, but not until he had killed ten Indians in his own defense and ran out of ammunition.

The attention of the mining world was centered on Virginia City and then on nearby Aurora while prospecting continued around Taylor's Gulch; but when the big strike came and some ten thousand miners rushed to the gulch the name of Bodie was adopted for the town. The correct spelling of the name was vague and so for convenience was spelled Bodie.

Bodey's bones were exhumed and lay in state in Masonic Hall before re-enterment in the Masonic Cemetery with much ceremony on November 4, 1879. In 1880 a sculptor was brought to Bodie to carve an imposing monument out of Bodie granite to mark his grave; but by fickleness of human nature it was caused to be enscribed "Erected To The Memory of James A. Garfield" when news of the President's assassination reached Bodie.

CAL-1918
Page 3

The town is situated on the floor of a comparatively level basin-like valley at an altitude of approximately 8300 feet with the gold bearing Bodie Buttes rising several hundred feet to the east. An official map "Townsite of Bodie, County of Mono, State of California, according to the official plot of the Bodie Townsite Survey, as surveyed by Leo A. Scowden in the year 1880" is of record in the Mono County Court House. The first mining claim registered was in August, 1859, when O. G. Leach, E. Donahue and L. H. Dearborn located the Bunker Hill Mine on the east slope of Bodie Bluff. It passed through several hands, including Leland Stanford, until sold to Seth and Dan Cook, John Boyd and William Lent for \$67,500. They changed the name and incorporated as The Standard Company in April, 1877, with main offices in the Nevada Block, San Francisco.

Other famous mines were the Bodie, Red Cloud, Jupiter, Owyhee, Midnight, Noonday, Bulwer, Mono Syndicate, Eureka (the deepest - 1200 feet). Men of mining fame other than those elsewhere mentioned, included such persons as Dr. Frank L. Bosqui - an expert on cyaniding, Charles Merrill, Paul M. Downing, Theodore Hoover - brother of Herbert Hoover, John Parr, John C. Bowden, William H. Landers, E. J. Clinton, Judge F. T. Bechtel and Alec McCone.

The last and probably the most prominent name associated with mining and other activities at Bodie was James Stuart Cain who came to Bodie in 1879 at the age of 25 and went to work for the Porter Lumber Company. His first independent venture was barging lumber across Mono Lake for use in the mines. He engaged in wagon freighting; and with Thomas Holt, leased the Bodie Railroad and Lumber Company. Also with Joe Maguire he leased a block of ground in the Standard Mine claim and took out \$90,000 in 90 days when he uncovered the Fortune ledge. In 1890 he bought the Bank of Bodie from E. L. Benedict and invested in a variety of businesses around the camp.

The J. S. Cain Company owned the Midnight Mine, and when it was proven in court in 1915 that the Management of the adjoining Standard Mine had deliberately and fraudulently tapped the Midnight property, the damages awarded to Midnight were so great that by a compromise Cain took over the Standard property; and with the later exodus from Bodie, the J. S. Cain Company became the principal owner of all properties at the once thriving mining camp of Bodie.

Two disastrous fires laid the business district to waste. The first great disaster occurred in 1892 when a fire took out Main Street from Boone's brick store building at Greet Street north to the Bodie Bank. The residential district was not harmed and replacements for burned buildings were largely made by moving buildings in from back streets; but Bodie had shrunk perceptibly.

On June 23, 1932, Bodie met with the most devastating fire from which it never did recover. This fire was started by a small boy playing with matches in a vacant building. Fortunately, the buildings south of Green Street, including the Miners' Union Hall escaped this fire as they had in 1892.

Again in 1946, when an attempt was made to revive the idle Klipstein-Rosecrans Mill, it burned to the ground just as it got started to operate again. No serious attempt has since been made to work the mines though it is the considered opinion of many that under more favorable conditions mining could again be profitable on Bodie Bluff.

In 1892, Tom Legett was Superintendent of Standard Mine, and with J. S. Cain's backing he proceeded on his theory that electricity could be transmitted over wires from a distance. Heretofore, energy for the mills was derived from steam generated by wood-fired boilers, and wood was becoming scarce and uneconomical.

A hydroelectric plant was built on Green Creek above Bridgeport and a transmission line was run for 13 miles to Bodie, which was paralleled by a telephone line. When all was in readiness and the mill had been revamped, word was flashed over the telephone line and the switch was thrown. To every ones delight the generators and motors began to hum. The Green Creek plant developed 6600 volts and 350 horsepower. The news flashed around the world and from Rhodesia to Australia offers came to the engineers to build hydroelectric plants. The first motor ever to be operated by electric power transmitted over long distance power lines is now in the Cain Museum in the Miners' Union Hall in Bodie, and the old power house is not yet completely in ruins.

Of particular public interest are the cemeteries at Bodie. Only the "Accepted" as respectable could be buried inside the fences that surrounded the adjoining Ward's, Masonic and Miners' Union Cemeteries. The men and women of the underworld and desperadoes were relegated to "Boot Hill" outside the fences, and in most cases without markers. The Chinese had their own burial grounds "outside the fence".

CAL-1918

Page 5

People, notorious in the underworld, were attracted to Bodie which gained a dubious reputation for lawlessness and vice. Women, like Rosa May, Emma Goldsmith, Madame Mustache and The Beautiful Doll, brought reputation with them from other mining camps to Maiden Lane and Virgin Alley where they ran their well patronized houses and flourished largely due to "highgrading" which was openly carried on by the miners. Adjoining the "Redlight District" was Chinatown which with its many opium dens played no small part in the vice at Bodie.

The mineral wealth uncovered at Bodie had to reach the outside world by stage to Carson City, Nevada, via Aurora, which was an invitation that could not be resisted by such bandits as the Small and McDonald gang, Vasquez and Chaves and lone highwaymen like "Three Finger Jack", "Johnny Behind the Rocks", and Charles Sharp. Famous Wells Fargo messengers, who worked at Bodie, were Aaron Ross, Oliver Roberts, Mike Tovey, Alex Montgomery, Eugene Blair and Alex Burke. It was Ross who was chosen to guard \$32,000,000 in gold and silver when the United States Government contracted, during World War I, to move the treasure from San Francisco to Denver.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL AND SOURCES

California State Historical Landmark No. 341
Cain, Ella M., The Story of Bodie, Fearon Publishers,
San Francisco 1956
Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. 56-11439
HABS Reports, 1962, on:
CAL-1919 Miners's Union Hall
CAL-1920 J. S. Cain Residence
CAL-1921 D. V. Cain Residence
CAL-1924 Methodist Church

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

In its present state, the town of Bodie presents an abandoned and desolate aspect to the lone tourist with no moving thing in view unless it is a blade of grass, for there is not a living soul, excepting another tourist, or even a growing tree in the town or on the surrounding hills.

Bodie is situated in a semi-arid country at an elevation of 8300 feet where only a scrubby sage brush can endure the rigors of the weather. It is located 12 miles over a dirt mountain road east of U. S. Highway 395 near the Nevada border about 10 miles due north of Mono Lake.

An abundance of very good water is available from springs. At one time there were twelve breweries operating in Bodie for this reason.

The houses and buildings have a uniformity due to the common denominator of the same mouldings, siding and trim which appears to have been produced by a single mill. Also the raw sun-burned and unpainted pine of which the buildings are, for the most part, constructed adds to uniformity in color which blends with the red and brown earth. Variety is achieved by variation in plan and form of buildings and three or four brick buildings that still are standing, which becomes evident only upon closer observation.

At the north end of Main Street at King Street, there are ruins of stone buildings that were built into excavations blasted out of solid granite hill side. The bank occupied such a site with rooms or chambers formed by granite rubble.

The buildings in the business district, for the most part, were typical fake front structures with rustic siding on the street front and board and batten elsewhere. The larger buildings, such as the Methodist Church (CAL-1924), Miners' Union Hall (CAL-1919) and school had a frame of wood studs with greater dimension parallel to the wall. The houses were generally of "board and girt" construction with 1 inch vertical boards, usually spaced from 12 to 24 inches on center with horizontal square edge boards laid up tight at the interior and 1 x 8 or 6 rustic laid up horizontal at the exterior. Wood shingles were commonly used for roofing.

The cornices and trim were generally composed of the same Ogee mouldings with some variety achieved by brackets, window caps and barge boards. A few houses such as the Johl Residence (CAL-1922) and the J. S. Cain Residence (CAL-1920) have applications of the Victorian Stick or Eastlake style.

The brick was manufactured at Aurora and lime came from a lime deposit about six miles from Bodie where Hank Blanchard operated a lime kiln.

Corrugated iron was used extensively for later mill buildings and for replacement roofing. Paint seems to have been used sparingly and indicates that white was the most common color when used.

CAL-1918

Page 7

Prepared by

A. Lewis Koue

A. Lewis Koue, AIA
National Park Service

December 1962

APPROVED:

Charles S. Pope

Date: Dec 19, 1962

Charles S. Pope, AIA
Supervising Architect, Historic Structures
Western Office
National Park Service